



Press Release

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY



INTEGRATED WASTE MANAGEMENT BOARD



DEPARTMENT OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES CONTROL

For Immediate Release:
February 9, 2006

Contacts: Ron Baker, DTSC (916.324.3142)
Jon Myers, CIWMB (916.341.6300)

Potentially Toxic Household Items No Longer Allowed in Trash Bins of California Homes or Businesses State's New Waste Rule affects products in everyday use

SACRAMENTO – Nearly everyone uses them – batteries, fluorescent lights, thermostats and small electronics, and many people don't think twice about tossing them in the trash. Starting today, households and small businesses will be required to recycle or properly dispose of these items under new state regulations governing the disposal of hazardous wastes.

In 2000, the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) adopted new regulations governing "universal waste," common household items that are deemed hazardous to people and the environment. In order to allow city and county waste management agencies time to develop the procedures to handle the new items, a four year exemption from the rules was granted households and small businesses (business with less than 50 employees). This exemption ended Feb. 8.

As of Feb. 9, these products must be separated from the regular trash and collected for safe disposal. If released into the environment, improper disposal of universal wastes can lead to groundwater contamination from chemicals like mercury, lead, acid, zinc, cadmium, or other corrosive and flammable toxins.

"The California Integrated Waste Management Board has proposed making available \$4.5 million in grant money to ease the potential financial burden to cities and counties responsible for handling universal waste," said Mark Leary, CIWMB Executive Director. The Board is scheduled to vote on the grant proposal next week. In addition, DTSC and the CIWMB are providing on-line resources to help Californians locate hazardous waste disposal sites in their areas. This information is available at www.zerowaste.ca.gov and www.dtsc.ca.gov

DTSC and the Waste Board are relying on households to work with County Household Hazardous Waste Programs to properly dispose of these hazardous items, including:

- Common batteries: AA, AAA, C cells, D cells, and button batteries, such as those used in hearing aids. These batteries contain toxic heavy metals such as cadmium, as well as corrosive chemicals.
- Fluorescent light bulbs and lamps that contain mercury: Fluorescent light tubes and bulbs, high-intensity discharge (HID), metal halide, sodium and neon bulbs all contain mercury vapors. If broken, mercury can be released into the environment and may cause nerve damage as well as a host of other serious illnesses.
- Thermostats, thermometers and novelty items: Thermometers, greeting cards that play music, shoes with lighted soles, and certain maze games contain mercury.
- Electronic devices: Computer monitors, TVs, cell phones, pagers, printers, computer bodies (CPUs and processors), video cassette recorders (VCRs), cordless and regular telephones, radios, and microwave ovens contain lead, cadmium, chromium, and copper.

Potentially Toxic Household Items No Longer Allowed in Trash Bins of California Homes or Businesses

Pg. 2

- Pilot light sensors, electric switches, barometers, blood pressure devices, stoves, ovens, water heaters, space heaters, clothes dryers, and furnaces frequently use mercury switches.
- Aerosol cans: Flammable propellants such as butane can remain in aerosol cans if not completely empty. If a can is marked "flammable" or "toxic," it should not be tossed into the trash unless it is completely empty of all contents.

"Our goal is to work together with local governments, private entities, and households to protect the health of Californians and our environment by properly recycling and disposing of universal waste with minimal impact on a household's daily activities," said Maureen Gorsen, DTSC Director. "Working together, we can ensure that these contaminants don't enter the environment."

The California Integrated Waste Management Board and the Department of Toxic Substances Control are two of six boards, departments, and offices within the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA).

#